

Notice of Exemption

Appendix E

To: Office of Planning and Research
P.O. Box 3044, Room 113
Sacramento, CA 95812-3044

County Clerk

County of: Orange

601 North Ross Street

Santa Ana, CA 92701

From: (Public Agency): Orange County Fire Authority
1 Fire Authority Road
Irvine, CA 92602

(Address)

Project Title: Orange County Firesafe Council CAR Community Hardening Phase 1 Project, Part 2

Project Applicant: California Sustainability Group, 638 Camino de los Mares, Ste. H130-456, San Clemente, CA 92673

Project Location - Specific:

In the Robinson Ranch and Trabuco Highlands neighborhoods in the City of Rancho S

Project Location - City: Rancho Santa Margarita Project Location - County: Orange

Description of Nature, Purpose and Beneficiaries of Project:

The California Sustainability Group proposes vegetation removal from 7.50 acres in three treatment zones, focusing on removal of fuel and vegetation no longer meeting OCFA Vegetation Management Guidelines from 100 feet of structures and along Robinson Ranch Road, the only access road to these communities surrounded by the Wildland Urban Interface. The scope of work for the treatment zones will be for acacia removal, and in registered fuel modification areas, they will remove dead vegetation, volunteers, and up to 50% of shrubs to meet Zone C thinning requirements. Trees will be skirted up to 6 feet to meet minimum vertical clearance requirements within 100 feet of structures.

Name of Public Agency Approving Project: Orange County Fire Authority

Name of Person or Agency Carrying Out Project: Bethany Ross

Exempt Status: **(check one):**

- ☐ Ministerial (Sec. 21080(b)(1); 15268);
- ☐ Declared Emergency (Sec. 21080(b)(3); 15269(a));
- ☐ Emergency Project (Sec. 21080(b)(4); 15269(b)(c));
- ☒ Categorical Exemption. State type and section number: Class 4, Section 15304
- ☐ Statutory Exemptions. State code number: _____

Reasons why project is exempt:

The proposed fuel reduction project is consistent with CEQA Guidelines Categorical Exemption Class 4 in that the project will not take endangered, rare, or threatened species or cause sedimentation into surface waters. There is a potential for endangered, rare, or threatened species to occur in some of the areas of native coastal sage scrub, but the project would avoid direct take through implementation of project design features included in the project description. The project is otherwise targeting both native and non-native plants to meet firesafe hardening requirements within the allowed 100-foot defensible space buffer from structures. In addition, because the project consists entirely of the removal of vegetation above ground and will not result in ground disturbance, it is considered exempt from the California Department of Forestry and Fire Protection's (CAL FIRE) cultural resources review as it qualifies as a "fire-safe project" to reduce the risk of catastrophic wildfires to surrounding communities by removing fire-prone vegetation within the project site.

Lead Agency

Contact Person: Scott Hatch Area Code/Telephone/Extension: (714) 573-6178

If filed by applicant:

1. Attach certified document of exemption finding.
2. Has a Notice of Exemption been filed by the public agency approving the project? Yes ☐ No ☒

Signature:  Date: 6/26/2026 Title: CEO

Signed by ☒ Lead Agency ☐ Signed by Applicant

Authority cited: Sections 21083 and 21110, Public Resources Code.
Reference: Sections 21108, 21152, and 21152.1, Public Resources Code.

Date Received for filing at OPR: _____